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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000136

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SUBJECT: MGIZ01: KING, CABINET PUBLICLY HAIL SUCCESS OF IRAQ ELECTIONS

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) King Hamad and the Bahraini Cabinet January 30 issued statements celebrating the success of Iraq's elections. The King sent a message, which was released to the press, to Iraqi Interim President Ghazi Yawar congratulating him on the success of the elections, saying that this was "the first step on the path to establishing an independent, secure, and stable Iraq."

¶2. (SBU) Following its January 30 session chaired by Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa, the Cabinet released a statement expressing its hope that a democratic and prosperous Iraq would emerge as a result of the elections. The Cabinet pledged its full support for the polls and said it had encouraged all ethnic and political groups to take part and elect nation-building leaders. The Ministers said that the "monumental" elections would determine the future of Iraq and enhance its stability and territorial integrity. They continued that the elections would help Iraq "achieve prosperity for its people and reinforce its regional and international status."

¶3. (SBU) Crown Prince Salman, speaking live to CNN January 29 from the World Economic Forum in Davos, stated that Bahrain was fully behind the elections in Iraq. He added, "This is a first step. It will be a long and difficult process but we must take that first step and capitalize on the moment that exists and that moment is now... There is one less dictator in the region... There is potential for more and I hope the people of Iraq do not waste" this opportunity. He said that without participatory government, there would be no future for the people of the region.

¶4. (SBU) Official Arabic daily Al Ayam, considered to be a government mouthpiece, trumpeted the success of the elections. The paper's front-page editorial said that "history will write that this day was the day that witnessed how Iraqis decided to take confident steps to enter the twenty-first century on the solid ground of democracy and freedom." (See septel for more press commentary.)

¶5. (C) The Embassy spoke with several parliamentarians and civil society contacts to gauge their reactions to the elections. Generally, Sunnis have reservations about the elections whereas Shia are celebratory. Hamad Al Mohannedi, a leader within the Salafi Al Asala bloc in the lower Council of Representatives (COR), told us that Iraq's Sunni had valid reasons for not participating (sic) in the elections. He said that the "occupation" of Iraq did not allow for free and fair elections. President of the opposition National Democratic Action Society Abdul Rahman Nuaimi, a Sunni, complained that the UN should have monitored the elections so the situation would have been more conducive to full participation. He hoped that the new parliament would focus on expediting a withdrawal of American forces from Iraq. The parliament should take into account the interests of all of Iraq's factions when drafting a constitution, without reference to sectarianism. The fact that the U.S. "administered" the elections gives him doubts about the true agenda for the elections.

¶6. (C) COR member Mohammed Al Abbas, who is part of the Shia Al Islamiya bloc, told us that the elections were a "great democratic change" that would impact the entire region and represented a challenge to all the terrorists and their activities. Referring to Iraq's Sunnis, he said that they did not conduct a full blown boycott. Rather, some small groups simply decided to refrain from voting. Jassim Hussein, an academic and member of the main Shia opposition group Al Wifaq, said that he was very excited by this "historic event," terming it a "job well done." The high level of participation indicated that Iraqis support change, and he hoped this would be only the first of more free and fair elections in the region. He was disappointed that some of the boycotters chose to use violence; they could have expressed their views in a non-violent way. He voiced his belief that Iraq could become a catalyst for true democratic change in the region.

¶7. (C) Comment: There is a general sense of happiness and

surprise at the high participation in the elections, mixed with relief that there was not more violence. At first glance, Bahrain's Sunni and Shia are reacting in manners consistent with the attitudes of many of their fellow sect members in Iraq. The ruling Al Khalifa family and the government have publicly and privately supported the elections all along. They are delighted that the polls turned out as well as they did, and should take heart from the Iraq experience that Bahrain's own path of political and economic reform is the only way forward into the future.

¶18. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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